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Choreographic Re-mix. William Forsythe's Trio (1996) and Beethoven's String Quartet No. 15 in a Minor Op. 132

"Beee Da Da Da Da Da-GO!" exclaims choreographer William Forsythe, prompting dancers Dana Caspersen, Thomas McManus and Jacopo Godani to anticipate their movement within the consequent phrase of Beethoven's theme.[1] The second movement of Ludwig van Beethoven's *String Quartet No. 15 in a minor* Op. 132 plays a prominent role within this short choreography called Trio, which premiered in 1996 at the Ballett Frankfurt. Despite this interesting example of Forsythe choreographing *to* or *with* Beethoven's music, he rarely developed pieces to Beethoven, working instead predominantly with living composers.[2] Given the archival video resources within my possession for study of the Ballett Frankfurt in 1996, this conference provided the impetus to analyse Forsythe's interpretation of Beethoven's music in the choreography of Trio – an interpretation in which a recording of the second movement of Op. 132 by the Alban Berg String Quartet is re-mixed.[3] The structure of Forsythe's musical decisions and my analysis of how the music and dance come together in this piece form the focus of this chapter, on the basis of specific research questions shaped further in this introduction.

The interrelation of dance and music has been the subject of ample artistic experiments. Looking at recent works in the field of contemporary dance, the scholar Christina Thurner has shown the diverse means by which music and dance can mutually re-charge their interpretation through being paired with one another, creating what she describes as "complex, and purposefully charged audiovisual associative-reflection spaces."[4] Such spaces subvert what the musicologists Carolyn Abbate and Roger Parker

1 Archival video of Ballett Frankfurt, 3 January 1996. Rehearsal and performance videos were generously provided by William Forsythe. Warm thanks to Alexandra Scott for her help in accessing these materials.

2 Freya Vass-Rhee's analysis of the sonic elements of Forsythe's choreographies from 1976 to 2011 lists two pieces sourcing Beethoven: Trio and the full-length work *Impressing the Czar* (1988), in which the fifth movement of Beethoven's String Quartet No. 14 Op. 131 is played as a sound sample and arranged into a synthesizer pop-song for the piece's grand finale; see Freya Vass-Rhee: *Audio-Visual Stress. Cognitive Approaches to the Perceptual Performativity of William Forsythe and Ensemble*, PhD dissertation, University of California Riverside 2011, pp. 140 and 359–383.

3 Alban Berg Quartett: *Ludwig van Beethoven. Quartett/Quartet op. 132*, EMI 1984 (rec. 1983), HMV 27 0053 1.

4 "[…] komplexen, vorsätzlich spannungsvollen audiovisuellen Assoziations- und Reflexionsräumen." Christina Thurner: "Danser: est-ce remplir un vide? Est-ce taire l'essence d'un cri?" Musikalische Reflexionsräume im zeitgenössischen Tanz, in: *Tanz im Musiktheater – Tanz als Musiktheater. Bericht eines internationalen Symposions über Beziehungen von Tanz und Musik im Theater*, ed. by Thomas Betz-

have dubbed the "fundamental assumption that all of us bring to 'reading' ballet", namely the prejudice that the movement "should be generated by and correspond to the music."[5] While the task here is not to test this expectation, it polemically sets the stage for Forsythe's re-mix of Beethoven – a contemporary interpretation bending the traditional allowances of both ballet and chamber music.

The questions addressed here were formulated reflectively between studying the archival video of *Trio* and reconsidering my practice as a former dancer in Forsythe's ensemble.[6] I wished to understand: What were the structural characteristics of the interplay of music and dance in this specific piece? Did Beethoven's music provide the impetus for the choreography of *Trio*, or was it a layer within a more complex process of choreographic creation? How did Forsythe and the dancers listen to and embody the music, and how did I, as a spectator of the piece? In my professional dance career, I had rarely performed to the music of historic composers. On the contrary, my embodied knowledge of musicality and musical interpretation in Forsythe's work was based on dancing pieces that Forsythe made in collaboration with *living* composers – predominantly Thom Willems (born 1955) and David Morrow (born 1952). In Ballett Frankfurt in the 1990s, there were more instances of performing to recorded music, but Freya Vass-Rhee's catalogue of the acoustic elements of Forsythe's performances shows that this generation also predominantly danced to the music of Forsythe's long-time collaborator, the Dutch composer Willems.[7] Thus I approached this project of examining *Trio* as a scholar with insight into the general interpretation practice of dancers to music and sound in Forsythe's *later* work, and a particular curiosity as to how and why Forsythe had turned to interpreting Beethoven's music in *Trio* nearly a decade before I arrived in Frankfurt.

This analysis unfolds along three timelines: the sequence of the piece, the chronology of the rehearsal process and situating the example in dance history. My writing interweaves these views. First, I describe the *mise en scène* of *Trio* visually and acoustically – introducing how the dancers' actions are paired with music and light, and situated in space. Secondly, taking a historic overview, I locate Forsythe's way of working disassociatively with music in *Trio* within some key historical examples, and describe the particular

wieser, Anno Mungen, Andreas Münzmay and Stephanie Schroedter, Würzburg 2009 (Thurnauer Schriften zum Musiktheater, Vol. 22), pp. 381–392, here p. 392. All English translations here are by the present author unless otherwise stated.

5 Carolyn Abbate/Roger Parker: Dismembering Mozart, in: *Cambridge Opera Journal* 2/2 (1990), pp. 187–195, here p. 187.

6 As a guest dancer in Ballett Frankfurt (2004), a dancer in The Forsythe Company (2005–2012), and a guest dancer and production assistant in The Forsythe Company (2013–2015).

7 Vass-Rhee: *Audio-Visual Stress*, pp. 357–382.

types of listening composed, or choreographed, in *Trio*. Then I return to the chronological timeline of the piece, detailing the structure of Forsythe's sampling, or re-mix, of Beethoven. Lastly, following the timeline of the production process of choreographing *Trio*, I examine the archival rehearsal videos to appraise how Beethoven's music was used in the choreographic process. Weaving these chronicles together, I build a picture of how Forsythe's way of listening to Beethoven's music reflects an understanding of music on multiple levels. I develop the argument that *Trio* plays with Beethoven's music by inciting an embodied, contextual and semantic response to listening to chamber music, re-mixed at the ballet.

To make this analysis welcoming to non-dance specialists, a brief introduction to Forsythe is offered here. The American choreographer William Forsythe (born 1949) is a controversial figure in the field of European contemporary dance. He served as the Artistic Director of Ballett Frankfurt (1984–2004) and The Forsythe Company (2005–2015), and is currently a freelance choreographer.[8] In his role as Director of Ballett Frankfurt, Forsythe created new ballets for his company each season. Forsythe used the term 'ballet' warmly, reflecting his heritage as a former dancer in the Stuttgart Ballet.[9] The dance critic Roslyn Sulcas has written that in Forsythe's work, "Ballet technique echos and resonates under the skin of the dance." In 1995, one year before the premiere of *Trio*, she characterised Forsythe's broad idiom more generally as "movement deconstructed and reassembled in conjunction with a distinctive theatrical aesthetic that combines speech and film, silence and stasis, amplified sound and mesmerizing lighting."[10] Forsythe's provocative work has provoked praise and reactionary criticism.[11] The acoustic aspects of Forsythe's pieces have received particular attention. Scholars have investigated how the dancers speak and sing on stage, as in *Tanztheater*, and how the dancers are required to produce sound and movement via intermodal improvisation and set choreographic tasks.[12] They have also considered how Forsythe and his collaborators used digital tools for sonification and to create sounding environments.[13] This article draws on Freya Vass-Rhee's and Chris Salter's prior arguments about Forsythe's aural compositions in

8 Since 2015 Forsythe is also Professor of Dance and Artistic Advisor for the Choreographic Institute at the University of Southern California Glorya Kaufman School of Dance.

9 See Roslyn Sulcas: Using Forms Ingrained in Ballet to Help the Body Move Beyond It, in: *The New York Times*, 9 December 2001.

10 Roslyn Sulcas: Channels for the Desire to Dance, in: *Dance Magazine* 69/9 (September 1995), pp. 52–59, here p. 52.

11 On his early reception in America see Mark Franko: Splintered Encounters. The Critical Reception to William Forsythe in the United States, 1979–1989, in: *William Forsythe and the Practice of Choreography. It Starts from Any Point*, ed. by Steven Spier, New York 2011, pp. 38–50.

12 Freya Vass-Rhee: Dancing Music. The Intermodality of The Forsythe Company, in: ibid., pp. 71–89.

13 Chris Salter: Timbral Architectures, Aurality's Force, in: ibid., pp. 54–70.

order to look closely at *Trio*, in hopes that our observations might resonate beyond the scope of dance and performance studies to touch on issues of musical interpretation.

Trio premiered on 20 January 1996 at the Frankfurt Opera house on an evening of short ballets called *Six Counter Points* and has been performed intermittently since that time (Tables 1–3). In this study, archival video of the premiere from 20 January 1996 is considered, not any subsequent versions of the piece. The rehearsal videos examined here were made for the Ballett Frankfurt archive, spanning twelve hours and dated 2–10 January 1996.

Table 1 Performance Credits, William Forsythe's *Trio*

Trio	
Choreography:	William Forsythe
Music:	Ludwig van Beethoven: *String Quartet No. 15 in a minor*, Op. 132, second movement: *Allegro ma non tanto*, performed by the Alban Berg Quartett
Stage and light design:	William Forsythe
Costume design:	Stephen Galloway
Original cast:	Dana Caspersen, Thomas McManus, Jacopo Godani
World premiere:	20 January 1996, Ballett Frankfurt, Frankfurt Opera House, Germany
Duration:	16'

Table 2 Performance Overview, William Forsythe's *Trio*

Ballett Frankfurt	
20 January 1996	World Premiere, Frankfurt Opera House, Germany
21, 25, 26, 27, 28 January 1996	Frankfurt Opera House, Germany
15, 16 March 1996	Bregenz, Austria
14–18 May 1996	Paris, Théâtre du Châtelet, France
3–6 July 1996	Rome, Italy
5 May 1997	Leverkusen, Germany
8–12 May 1997	Frankfurt, Schauspielhaus, Germany
The Forsythe Company	
22–26 November 2006	Frankfurt, Bockenheimer Depot Germany
10,11 March 2007	Ottawa, National Arts Center, Canada
Performed by other companies (premieres)	
20 September 2007	The Hague, Lucent Danstheater, Netherlands (Nederlands Dans Theater)
14 February 2008	Munich, Gärtnerplatztheater, Germany
15 April 2017	Paris, Palais Garnier, France (Paris Opera Ballet,)

Table 3 *Six Counter Points* – Performance, 1996/97

Ballet	**Credit**	**Composer**
The The	Soundtrack score	Dana Caspersen and William Forsythe
	Soundtrack voice	Dana Caspersen
Duo	Music	Thom Willems (music for live piano and acoustics)
Trio	Music	Ludwig van Beethoven: *String Quartet No. 15 in a minor*, Op. 132, second movement: *Allegro ma non tanto*, performed by the Alban Berg Quartett

Four Point Counter	Music	Thom Willems
The Vertiginous Thrill of Exactitude	Music	Franz Schubert, Symphony No. 9 in C major, D 944, 3rd movement: Scherzo, performed by The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Conducted by Carlos Païta
Approximate Sonata	Music:	Thom Willems, Tricky: Pumpkin

Mise en Scène Forsythe's *Trio* has no narrative or characters. The piece begins with a cue to the front lights, revealing three dancers standing at the very front of the stage – a black curtain behind them.[14] They stand with neutral tension, without projecting any expression or personality. Their costumes are situated between casual street clothes and dance costume: the men wear patterned shirts and pants, the woman a long camisole over red pants. Before the audience has stopped clapping for the preceding piece, the left dancer looks down upon his torso and takes his left forearm in his hand, rotating it towards the audience for view. He looks forward at the public and waits. After a short pause, the female dancer steps forward and stretches her left arm to show the inside flank of her elbow. Quickening in pace, the third man reaches under the fabric of his T-shirt to exhibit the side of his abdomen, as the first man kneels down to hold his right knee. Gestures begin to gather speed and to become more visible, as the dancers' forward progression pulls them closer to one another and the audience.

There is no 'music' yet – only the slight sounds of the dancers adjusting their bodies. The dancers' poses exhibit ways of gripping, framing and showing segments of the body. These postures are not elegant and expressive positions, but detached and clinical articulations. Their gestures fold into one another, producing strange knots of two and three bodies (Figure 1). As actions clearly addressing spectators, but lacking the lexical clarity of an existing dance technique, the dancers' cold, anatomical demonstrations call for interpretation. In the time when the dancers lift their eyes to address the audience, the silence creates a palpable beat – a marker of the unresolved meaning of the situation. The quietness also prolongs suspense, drawing the spectator into a physical state of questioning and listening: What is going on here? The charged poses rouse the attention of the audience. The silence punctuates interpretation in progress.

The tiny sounds made by the dancers' steps and holds gradually build in volume and tempo. They touch one another – framing a shin, pulling the skin aside to show the bulbous knob of an elbow joint. They maintain an air of detachment, looking at each other's bodies coolly. After walking formally back upstage, they begin a reprise of the previous sequence, in which their movements become more audible. Falling limbs and weighty slaps make heaves, smacks and thick thuds. The dancers' actions accelerate. The

14 The orchestra pit has been covered, allowing the dancers to stand on the so-called 'apron' area of the space.

Figures 1 and 2 **Trio by William Forsythe. 1: Performance of The Forsythe Company in 2006 with Ioannis Mandafounis (left) and Dana Caspersen (right); 2: Performance of Ballett Frankfurt in 1996 with Thomas McManus (left), Dana Caspersen (middle) and Jacopo Godani (right). Photos by Dominik Mentzos**

reprise demonstrates that the movement is not improvised. Rather this is a choreography of actions: complex grips and manipulations of flesh. The dancers' limbs entangle, deform and align. In one moment their arms overlay, almost as one. The sound of their movement progresses like a fire – from intermittent pops to continuous shifts, like wood as it crackles and burns.

Contrast this first scene to a minute later in the performance, when the dancers are moving to the second movement of Beethoven's *String Quartet* No. 15 *in a minor* Op. 132. Now dance movements surge within and between three touching dancers, displaying speed, syncopation and complexity beyond the refrained grammar of ballet steps. The small female dancer is slid and lifted by her partners, relating to the music's dynamic and melodic architecture. Hands touch and manoeuvre: rotating shoulders, grasping a head, sliding a leg. The men ricochet off the floor and bounce off one another. In a *Trio* of constantly shifting partners, the dancers initiate and echo the movement of one another's limbs. The 3/4 metre fits well to the dancers' swings and slides, offering a minuet feel and underlining the lightness of the dance. Developing the entanglements and alignments of the previous section, Forsythe crafts virtuosity in extension and elevation, captured well in the press photograph by Dominik Mentzos in which Thomas McManus and Dana Caspersen's legs make an inverted leap (Figure 2). Initially, the dance and the music align rather well – admittedly more syncopated and complex than typical ballet, but still fitting the spirit of the music. While relatively exuberant, the choreographic pairing of movement and Beethoven's music is still marked by the contrast with the prior, near-silent section. Rather like the suspense of a good horror film, everything seems right, yet amiss.

From this point of dancing seemingly *to* or *on* the music, Forsythe does not continue to play the Allegro continuously as Beethoven composed it. Instead, *Trio*'s dramaturgy

involves many abrupt cuts in the music, in which the recording is paused and then restarted, creating replay loops. The cuts and repetitions, as a *re-mix*, draw attention to the fact that the music is one layer in the composition – at times in parallel with the movement and at other times backgrounded or absent. The dancers demonstrate their agency by dancing on and off the music.

Staging replay as re-mix, Forsythe interprets not only Beethoven's music but also the process of listening to a *recording* of Beethoven's music in a theatrical (that is, a ballet) setting. *Trio* explores the effects and affects of the Alban Berg Quartett's recording, a tension heightened by turning the music on and off. The term affect is used here in accordance with Brian Massumi's Deleuzian reading of Spinoza, as affectation beyond emotion – the "intensity" of experience in its intermodal flush. Massumi considers affect to exist between movement and sensation.[15] Here I extend the meaning of affect to focus on the intensity (and perplexity) of interpreting *Trio* as an audio-visual medium. Rather than resolving which theoretical paradigms best describe the reception of Forsythe's choreographies, I here aim to illustrate the musical aspects of *Trio*'s choreographic structure and explain the qualities of interpretation therein.

In my view, to understand how Forsythe interprets Beethoven's music requires a dual analysis of *Trio*'s silent and musical parts, and what is produced in their relation. Rather than solely heightening awareness or attention, the contrast of two *mise en scène* types creates a strange kind of intensity: a musical muddle. *Trio* opens up a space and time in which there is *play*, and as Thurner has also argued more generally in other performances of contemporary dance, space for the audience's association and reflection.[16] I shall next account for this argument in greater detail.

The first style of *mise en scène* in *Trio* underlies a *body-sounding* world. The spectators, hushed, listen to the sound of the dancers' bodies.[17] The dancers figure and de-figure themselves, constructing poses that are visceral yet ambiguous in their meaning: empty signs. One cannot name what the dancers are doing, nor even the body parts they show – the limb is always at peculiar angle, or framed as an unusual flank, not a clear demonstration or representation of a part. But the sounds of their bodies and the sight of their touch links this theatrical act to a real sense of what it means to have, hold and drop limbs. The sounds cross the fourth wall and touch the audience. By knowing how and where to grab, the dancers appear to make sense of each other's bodies; but the forms that they make are hybrid, even grotesque. In other words, the dancers' poses escape the form and

15 See Brian Massumi: *Parables of the Virtual. Movement, Affect, Sensation*, Durham 2002, p. 27.

16 Thurner: "Danser: est-ce remplir un vide? Est-ce taire l'essence d'un cri?", pp. 381 f.

17 Here I emphasise the hush of audience, but otherwise use the word synonymously with Vass-Rhee; see Vass-Rhee: *Audio Visual Stress*, pp. 172–183, on *Trio* p. 176.

rhetorical grammar of dance, but they are close and real to the audience. As argued by dance scholar Gabriele Brandstetter in her essay describing Forsythe's approach to "defigurative choreographies", the dancers simultaneously present and dissolve in representation.[18] The *body-sounding* world relies on a cultivated sense of listening and watching for equivocal signs. Importantly, the real sounds of the dancers' bodies bring the audience close to something concrete yet unclear. It primes them to listen.

But then: world two, music! The second style of *mise en scène* features the music of Beethoven's *String Quartet in a minor*. With the opening measures, the dancers literally run towards the centre of the stage! The theatrical elements turn on. The light becomes brighter. Whereas the body-sounding world foregrounded the drama of the raw or physical body, the second style of *mise en scène*, the *ballet-sounding* world, foregrounds the drama of the theatrical apparatus: that is what transpires when light, music, and dancing movement come together in one *Gestalt*. This second, musical world is full of effervescent movements that give flight to the dancers' limbs: cause and effect, catches and throws, stunning lifts. In the *ballet-sounding* world, the ideal of music and movement corresponding is perfected. But the affect is still puzzling, for the format is never sustained or without successive contrasts.

In the dramaturgy that follows, Forsythe develops these two contrasting styles of *mise en scène* – the *body-sounding* and the *ballet-sounding* worlds – through intermixing elements. Music, sound, light, space, poses and movement are recombined. In so doing, Forsythe plays upon different affects, or intensities, creating a matrix of different forces. The choreographer also deliberately uses techniques of inconsistency, contradiction and incoherence on the semantic level as compositional devices. Examples include the inconsistency of animation, the contradiction of leaving the backstage space illuminated, and the incoherence of the dancers' sound. I shall now examine each of these more closely.

First, Forsythe's *Trio* provocatively tests the liveness of the theatrical situation. While Beethoven's music provides an animating and propelling force, both in creating a light mood and paralleling the dancing movement, the pauses and replay show that *Trio*'s music is not alive. Forsythe plays a recording of the music – emphasising to the audience that the medium is a CD by playing it at high volume and cutting into it abruptly. The music is present as a loud, pre-recorded, filmic layer – not as a breathing string quartet. The music is incoherently present *and* recorded. Secondly, the scenery spouts contradictions. When the theatrical light is on in the second style of *mise en scène*, the audience can

18 Gabriele Brandstetter: Defigurative Choreography. From Marcel Duchamp to William Forsythe, in: *The Drama Review* 42/4 (1998), pp. 37–55.

clearly see the raw elements of the backstage space, such as ladders and other technical elements. Thus, in contrast to the dark opening of the piece, at the illuminated climax of possible theatrical illusion, Forsythe also shows its opposite: the real space of the wings. Thirdly, there is a contradiction between the amount of movement and the amount of sound. Because of the dancers' training, when the dancers move most they are silent. Conversely, when they are performing non-dance actions manipulating one another, their bodies are audible. This makes apparent that the virtuosity of dance movement, an expressive capacity, is acoustically muted. A final point of incoherence is within the perceived closeness of the dancers. When the dancers are nearest to the audience and when they look directly upon them, they appear most remote and alienated in their expression. In contrast, when they are furthest away and dancing, they seem most human and alive in their presence. These gaps of incoherence, complication and contradiction are key aspects of Forsythe's choreographic style, which is enticing to understand, but conversely demanding to interpret. They suggest that in his approach to contemporary *mise en scène*, Forsythe enlivens and refreshes simple dramaturgy with situations that are more compound and obfuscating. As Salter has described, Forsythe takes "interest in the affect of sound on the spectator/listener and, in particular, sound's ability to go beyond narrative and representation and be rendered into intensities and forces." [19] Here, in agreement with Salter, *Trio* shows how Forsythe re-mixes compositional elements to afford new ways of listening to Beethoven's chamber music at the ballet.

Listening: From Cage/Cunningham to Barthes The example of *Trio* is one of Forsythe's many explorations at the intermodal interface of audio-visual composition. Dance performances that break the rules of codified dance steps and skew the comfortable synergies of music and movement have become common in contemporary dance – especially since the avant-garde investigations in New York in the 1960s and '70s, themselves based upon the pivotal breakthroughs of John Cage and Merce Cunningham. The association of music and dance was shaken by their fundamental experiments, from movement that imitates or expressively unfolds from sound – music that according to George Balanchine serves as an "architect of time" providing the "dancer's floor" and "the reason for us to move." [20] Fifty years before *Trio*, Merce Cunningham described his performance *Root of an Unfocus* (1944) as follows:

19 Salter: Timbral Architectures, Aurality's Force, p. 57.

20 Interview with George Balanchine with Louis Botto reproduced as George Balanchine: Work in Progress, in: *Dance as a Theatre Art. Source Readings in Dance History from 1581 to the Present*, ed. by Selma Jeanne Cohen, London 1977, pp. 187–192, here p. 190.

> "It was divided into time units, and the dance and the music would come together at the beginning and the end of each unit, but in between they would be independent of each other. This was the beginning of the idea that music and dance could be dissociated, and from this point on the dissociation in our work just got wider and wider."[21]

The inventions that unfolded in America and Europe afterwards are numerous, from the well-documented works of choreographers Mark Morris and Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker to Jérôme Bel's critical examination of musical dispositive.[22] The French choreographer Alice Chaucet writes of spectatorship today that "the spectator of a piece is confronted with an ensemble of signs (style, references, topic, relations between the performers, relations between them and the audience, physicality, theatricality, costumes, music, set lights, text, program text, etc.)", but she concludes that: "Watching a performance […] one learns about how to watch."[23] I would add that dance spectators also learn how to *listen*.

To address how choreography crafts situated listening, Vass-Rhee has written in favour of an "auditory turn" within dance studies to address the particular, amodal ways that seeing-hearing and watching-listening are composed by choreographers, and to examine the complex ways in which music and sound are being incorporated into contemporary dance performances.[24] This picks up on Hans-Thies Lehmann's account of contemporary or "postdramatic" theatre, to which Forsythe's work is considered to belong. In postdramatic theatre, the action of characters in a plot has been replaced by diverse means of deferring, defeating, juxtaposing, and fragmenting perception: "an open and fragmented perception in place of a unified and closed perception."[25] Lehmann remarks upon the importance of sound and musicalisation in this, and the at-large challenges that theatregoers face in encountering new perceptual levels, styles and demands.

Lehmann says that with the density of signs in postdramatic theatre, often there "is either too much or too little".[26] Vass-Rhee has similarly described this in Forsythe's

21 Calvin Tomkins: *The Bride & the Bachelors. Five Masters of the Avant-Garde*, New York 1968, p. 245.

22 See Inger Damsholt: Mark Morris, Mickey Mouse, and Choreomusical Polemic, in: *The Opera Quarterly* 22/1 (2006), pp. 4–21; Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker/Bojana Cvejić: *Drumming & Rain. A Choreographer's Score*, Ghent 2012; Christina Thurner: Die Stimme erhoben. "Ich"-Sagen und Autorschaft in den Tänzerporträts von Jérôme Bel, in: *Performing Voice*, ed. by Leo Dick and Anne-May Krüger, Friedberg 2019, pp. 209–215.

23 Alice Chauchat: Watching, one learns how to watch, in: *Reverse Engineering Education in Dance, Choreography and the Performing Arts. Follow-up Reader for* MODE05, ed. by Ulrike Melzwig, Mårten Spångberg and Nina Thielicke, Berlin 2007, pp. 54–57, here pp. 56 f.

24 Freya Vass-Rhee: Auditory Turn. William Forsythe's Vocal Choreography, in: *Dance Chronicle* 33/3 (2010), pp. 388–413.

25 Hans-Thies Lehmann: *Postdramatic Theatre*, Abingdon 2006, p. 82.

26 Ibid., p. 89.

oeuvre, making precise claims about *how* this operates by citing research in cognitive science.[27] But Forsythe's inclusion of bodily noises and vocalisation by the dancers does more than shift the perceptual levels of performance. The acoustic layer shapes how the audience comes to understand and relate to the presence of the dancers through the sounds of the dancers' breath and bodies. Beyond differences of degree, they shape differences in kind – the audience's affectual relationship to the performance and inclusion in an intersubjective space. As Roland Barthes has written, this underlines how listening is a layered phenomenon – fundamentally an embodied one, before it ventures into the decoding act of hermeneutics. For Barthes, the intelligence of human listening is an attitude of alertness in the realm of dancer or prey. The organism selects or filters foreground from background, and indexes what is heard to where it is in space as a defence of territory. Listening pulls the multiplicity of sensation into clarity. Human listening forms an intersubjective awareness. Barthes writes:

> "The first listening might be called an *alert*. The second is a *deciphering*; what the ear tries to intercept are certain signs. Here, no doubt, begins the human: I listen the way I read, i. e., according to certain codes. Finally, the third listening, whose approach is entirely modern [...], does not aim at – or await – certain determined, classified signs: not what is said or emitted, but who speaks, who emits: such listening is supposed to develop in an inter-subjective space where 'I am listening' also means 'listen to me'".[28]

In Trio Forsythe emphasises the listening situation, hearing live people produce sound using their bodies, before he introduces the recorded music of Beethoven. He activates the dancers, and the audience, to be alert. With Trio, Forsythe attends to listening on and between the levels extended by Barthes: in the embodied level of alert, within the situated realm of context, ongoing within the hermeneutic mode of deciphering, and between spectators and dancers as intersubjective. The disassociative potential of music and dance becomes a realm where listening as interpreting is highlighted.

The Structure of Forsythe's Choreographic Re-Mix Re-mixes are a digital fact. They may lead to the adaptation of works of music far from the author's original intent. More generally, a re-mix describes the compositional process of "recombining preexisting media content – popular songs, films, television programs, texts, web data – to fabricate a new work".[29] While Forsythe does not interpret Beethoven's music as a composer might, that is, by orchestrating or adapting the score, his interpretation is reverently irreverent, by echoing repeats within the composition.

27 Vass-Rhee: Audio-Visual Stress.

28 Roland Barthes: The Responsibility of Forms. Critical Essays on Music, Art and Representation, trans. Richard Howard, Berkeley 1991, pp. 245 f.

29 David J. Gunkel: Of Remixology. Ethics and Aesthetics After Remix, Cambridge 2016, p. XVII.

Table 4 Re-Mix Musical Loops, Cues, Construction
Abbreviations: D. C. Dana Caspersen, T. M. Thomas McManus, J. G. Jacopo Godani
▸ play CD track, ↩ restart track from the beginning, ❚❚ pause CD track

Loop	Cue	Re-Mix Directions
1	T. M. turns back	▸ Lights and music mm. 1–4 ❚❚
2	just before D. C. arrives to centre stage	↩ mm. 1–22 ❚❚
3	D. C. and T. M. lift J. G.	↩ mm. 1–22, reprise mm. 1–4 ❚❚
4	J. G. and T. M. lift D. C.	↩ mm. 1–22, complete reprise ❚❚
5	dancers knots arms	↩ mm. 1–22, reprise until after m. 12
		❚❚ 2 seconds
		▸ until m. 19 beat 2 ❚❚
	J. G. and T. M. run upstage	↩ m. 13 until m. 19 beat 2 ❚❚
6	J. G. drops arm onto D. C.'s hand	mm. 1–22, complete reprise, until after m. 40 ❚❚
7	D. C. solo	↩ mm. 1–22, complete reprise until after m. 60 ❚❚
8	T. M. jumps over J. G.	↩ mm. 1–22, complete reprise until after m. 199 ❚❚

In this section I analyse the structure of Forsythe's re-mix of the recording of Beethoven's *String Quartet* No. 15 *in a minor* Op. 132 by the Alban Berg Quartett. The relationship between the musical score and the re-mix are shown in Table 4. This illustrates how Forsythe's re-mix is pragmatically low-tech – made by simply hitting pause, play and replay. Forsythe edits the second movement into eight musical loops, with each loop becoming progressively longer. These cuts in the music accentuate the underlying tensions in Beethoven's composition, turning Beethoven's intended repeat of the first section (end measure 22) into an echo. In his re-mix, Forsythe prolongs fulfilment and repetition of the first section (loops 1–4). This is followed by a development section, where pauses and cuts are more frequent and abrupt (loops 5–7). To conclude, Forsythe finishes with a complete loop from the beginning to 'il fine' (loop 8). The second half of Beethoven's original composition is not used.

The choreographic action develops in parallel to the musical layer: not dependently or analogously, but interactively. As shown in my observation of cues listed in Table 4, each loop is initiated by a technician reading the dancers' timing. Rather than the music conducting the dancers, the dancers conduct the music. Moreover, the dancers maintain their musicality, indifferent and independent of the shifts in light and sound around them. Constructing diverse types of disassociation and re-association of the movement and dance, Forsythe exploits the enormous potential of this music within his layered composition. He indulges in producing affects with Beethoven's composition by sometimes letting music and action align, and sometimes deliberately deferring this fulfilment.

I shall now describe this progression in depth. After the initial section without music, *Trio* begins by pairing the antecedent motif with the rising action of the curtain: the melodic line and the lifting of the fabric synchronise with the two male dancers running

upstage. After a short pause of the CD track, during which the female dancer runs back to join her partners, the music restarts, and the sound overlays the partnering movement previously described (that is, the *ballet-sounding* world). The music plays until the completion of the first part (that is, up to measure 22) and then pauses for fifteen seconds. In the gap without music, the dancers continue moving, showing their indifference to needing a musical impulse. The third loop is cued poignantly, almost humorously, by a light lift of the male dancer Jacopo Godani. Shifting from partnering action, the dancers perform individual material, then a solo and duet combination with alignment in form and timing. They end with a section of trio partnering without music, in which their steps and breath are audible.

At the height of a lift, the fourth loop is cued. Progressing from solos performed downstage, the first part (ending measure 22) resolves with a recapitulation of the opening gestures of bodily exhibition, in which the dancers appear highly shadowed due to backlight. With the music's repetition, a second solo takes place, followed by the slow build of a lift of Dana Caspersen that falls apart without a climax before the musical resolution of the phrase (measure 21). In the twenty seconds of silence between loops three and four, the dancers go to the dark area at the front of the space and are heard breathing. They then walk to the illuminated part of the stage and reset their movement twice into an entanglement, with all their arms knotted together.

The fifth loop begins when the dancers retract their arms from this knot. In this section, Forsythe makes more drastic acoustic cuts. First, the dancers accelerate from gestures of bodily grasping into sweeping slides and dives that take them across the stage as a group. During the first short pause in the music, the dancers walk forward casually as if it is part of the choreography, restarting their actions a few seconds after the music resumes. Then a cut, or pause, happens for the first time in the middle of the measure, rather than at the end of a phrase. This halt breaks discordantly into a high lift of Dana Caspersen. With this abruptness, Forsythe makes clear to anyone unfamiliar with the musical score that this is a digital intervention in the music. In parallel, the dancers break out of their actions and roles as performers: Jacopo Godani looks at the audience, Dana Caspersen fixes her shoe, and Thomas McManus rubs his eyes. The dancers resume their movement in silence before running to the side of the room, out of the light. These aspects demonstrate how in the progression of the re-mix, Forsythe's strategies emphasise the disassociative potential of music and dance, and break with the normative coding of performing ballet well.

These compositional devices continue in the sixth and seventh loops, in which Forsythe choreographs further development and estrangement. In the sixth loop, Forsythe inserts short walking motifs and turning steps (within the anatomical gestures and the trio partnering sequences). These additions add a new layer of ambiguity to the

motion, by simultaneously suggesting formal dance patterns and informal pedestrian action – again a contradiction. The seventh loop presents outlying material – a long solo for Dana Caspersen while the men are still, followed by a duet between the men. Here is one of the few sections in which Beethoven's music is treated as a background to the dance, secondary to the planned action. The seventh loop ends with one dancer sprinting forward and loudly decelerating his motion, followed by a suspended interval of stillness and silence in which the dancers all stare at the audience for ten long seconds. Then the dancers run upstage, and Jacopo Godani flops down onto the floor acrobatically before the music restarts.

The eighth loop delays recapitulation by beginning with further development. The dancers explore the peripheral, dark regions of the space, ending at the front. In the reprise of measures 1–22, the anatomical material is approached again – this time with music. Forsythe choreographs delays and removal, showing for example a gap in the air where there had once been a head. Forsythe also adds new bodily registers to the movement, or references to places on the body. At times these become more explicit: grabbing a groin, or showing an ass. They also become more bizarre, such as a stretch where one of the male dancers seems to tickle his ear or an entanglement where the limb of one dancer is placed in the open mouth of the other. These fast grasps and acts, which in the archival video act almost like subliminal blitzes, preserve the ambiguity of how to interpret the piece.

As is typical with Forsythe's choreography of contradiction, the affect of these gestures is made more bizarre by the shifting musical relationship – this time Forsythe chooses explicitly to align the gestures to the music. For example, Thomas McManus turns to the audience to strike a short 'vogue' pose on the last beat of the repeat (measure 22).[30] Next, as if it were a magic trick or a disappearing act, Jacopo Godani holds his hands in the air when his partner suddenly retracts his elbow. Godani's hands show the empty space where McManus's limb used to be. This is performed parallel to the suspense of the previous crescendo (measures 31 f.) along with the string players' fortissimo. Then the trio runs upstage with Dana Caspersen's arm in Jacopo Godani's mouth, in parallel to the light, descending arpeggios (measures 41–44). These short passages of movement-to-music alignment are signs of a rejoining, after disassociative experiments.

Building toward the end, beginning with the crescendo in measure 45, the dancers resume their partnering as a trio, while striving for greater elevation in their jumps and

30 Vogue or voguing is a popular dance form that emerged in the 1980s in Harlem (New York) which involves, among elements, sharp movements of the hands framing the body as if posing for a fashion photo shoot.

making more frequent citation of ballet forms and positions. The dancers seem to dance in an overt 3/4 metre, lilting and springing to the music. Their actions sequence into a lift of Dana Caspersen that parallels the expressive line of the violin (measures 87 f.). Then Forsythe returns to the anatomic exhibiting movements of the opening of *Trio*, but this time *with* Beethoven's music (measures 91–97); initially, this culminating contradiction feels like a transformation. Then Forsythe inserts a long pause of twelve seconds, in which the dancers visibly stand and breathe. Coming back into the musical drama, after the crescendo, the dancers suddenly accelerate on the fortissimo (measures 31 f.) to run back upstage. The dancers repeat the grips that moved them forward, performed previously in the opening sequence of the piece – now illuminated, quickly and without making any sound. Surprisingly, they finish just at the point where the music resolves (measure 71). Then Forsythe stages a reprise of the opening dance, the *ballet-sounding* world. Although the actions are not aligned with music precisely as they were in the first repetition (which began with the antecedent, not the consequent phrase), the section feels like a return to music-dance parallelism.

Trio ends with a traditional comic nod to pairing action and music in harmony. The dancers return to the front of the stage where the opening scene took place, off the dance-floor and out of the bright theatrical lighting. Their ballet citations swell into poses held during a fermata (measure 109). With two audible accented slaps of their arms, the dancers continue to repeat previous dancing material – sounding through the steps. On the final two notes of the melody, Dana Caspersen looks with her head to make sure that the three performers are in a line and they bow like harlequins. The witty conclusion is a pleasing ending, resolving the original tension of the opening styles of *mise en scène*, and the extended development of various affects.

In my reading of *Trio*, the increasingly flippant parallelism of movement and music suggests that this is a self-aware choreography, with a sense of historical humour. As the piece proceeds, the dance shifts modes more frequently: from abstract and self-referential to ironic reverie. The restarts and repetitions, delays and echoes, accentuate the tension of listening and prolong the delight when novelty is finally reached. The initial *ballet-sounding* world, where music and dance align, primes the audience to long for further dancing to the music of Beethoven. Relief ensues as I watch the dancers get closer and closer to the end, both in empathy with their physical exhaustion and in relief after the tension raised by disassociation and repetition. As is common in many of Forsythe's choreographies, *Trio* also explores the diverse portraiture of the dancers as performers – from raw bodies to virtuosic artists, shadowed figures in silhouette, people taking a break, humans grasping for sex, to entertainers. In sum, Forsythe's choreographic counterpoint accentuates the shifting and compound meaning of the dancing act, in parallel to the moving aspect of music.

Choreographic Process Making Trio *Trio* opens up many possible avenues of interpretation. My background reading of the historical context in which Beethoven wrote the "Heiliger Dankgesang", namely his intestinal illness in 1825, sparked one such hypothesis. In this movement of the quartet, directly after the music used for *Trio*, Beethoven marked passages of slow serenity that are in contrast to faster passages "neue Kraft fühlend" – reflecting the long and turbulent process of progressing from sickness to health.[31] While the second movement used for *Trio* does not follow the progression of malady to vitality in music, the choreography of *Trio* does progress in this way – from exhibited, apathetic limbs to light balletic coquetry. I wondered: was this a coincidence? At what point did Forsythe begin to consider Beethoven's music? When and how was the re-mix constructed? To consider these questions, I conclude with analysis of the archival rehearsal videos.

Although it is possible that Forsythe was inspired by the liner notes to the Alban Berg Quartett's recording, there is no evidence to support this. In the rehearsal, Forsythe does not speak about Beethoven's biography, history or intentions. Nor does he begin the first dance rehearsal with Beethoven's music. Instead, Forsythe starts by articulating his intent.

The first rehearsal video begins with Forsythe holding the limbs of Dana Caspersen, explaining to the dancers his general compositional idea as he moves her:

> "[…] almost exhibiting of limbs and body parts – but also taking each other's parts, and exhibiting them, and ending up in a kind of situation where, we're forced to keep coming to the front of the stage, right, like that – and have these – how can I say? [pause] – little vignettes. – And [pause] keep pulling each other out of these, out of these entanglements – a series of entanglements of entanglements."[32]

Forsythe then invented the first partnering section in collaboration with the dancers, without music. Between creating movement trios, duets and three solos in silence, diverse pieces of music were tried intermittently (including the second movement epilogue section of Schubert's *Symphony in b minor* D 759 "The Unfinished" and Nirvana's "Milk it"). When the second movement of Beethoven's string quartet was tried, Forsythe asked for the dancers to emphasise their lightness. The tempo and 3/4 metre matched the motion well. Forsythe indicated that he was very pleased but not ready to make a final commitment.

In the rehearsal on 7 January 1996, Forsythe tailored the sequences he had made to fit the Alban Berg Quartett's recording, linking inflections of musical dynamic, such as

31 "feeling new strength", Edward Dusinberre: In Sickness and Health. How Beethoven Tested the Takács Quartet, in: *The Guardian*, 2 January 2016, www.theguardian.com/books/2016/jan/15/takacs-quartet-beethoven (last accessed 1 April 2018).

32 Rehearsal on 2 January 1996, video recording, time 0:06–0:36.

crescendos in the music, and aligning melodies to specific motions, especially the entry into and descent from lifts. The dancer Thomas McManus and William Forsythe conveyed timing by singing, rather than counting. Forsythe also cued anticipation and movements that should be independent or before the music.

During the stage rehearsal on 10 January 1996, Forsythe again explored using other musical sources, including several of the two-part and three-part piano inventions by Bach. As I had experienced in The Forsythe Company, while musicality motivates the choreography during its development, the stage space provides a specific context in which choices are reconsidered. This means that, in *Trio*, Forsythe worked with music both as a contingent material in editing movement, and as an aspect of the dispositive of ballet that is shaped along with light and stage direction.

What touched me most in watching the archival rehearsals is how Forsythe and the dancers move and sang with empathy: dancing as musicking![33] As Forsythe played different pieces of music on the stereo system in the studio, the dancers easily shifted their interpretation, showing exceptional musical virtuosity. I wish to emphasise that Forsythe's exploration of the disassociative potential of music and dance in *Trio* is not rooted in any deficit of musicality – but rather in his (and the dancers') potent ability to be affected by music and to work with it. They are being musical, producing something-like-music between their bodies and listening to their own sounds, between those intended by Beethoven.

Conclusion As I had anticipated, Beethoven's music was an important layer in the choreographic process of making *Trio*, but did not instigate it. While the question of *why* Forsythe turned to Beethoven's music could not be answered on the basis of archival video sources, the videos did reveal how Forsythe enacted an understanding of Beethoven's music – not in relation to the score, or based upon the culture of chamber music playing, but as an activity of choreographing the audience's reception. Forsythe's interpretation of Beethoven was highly influenced by the materials through which he encountered the music, that is through a CD as well as his own and the dancers' bodies. *Trio* was also shaped according to the specific environment of playing the recorded music in the coded context of the theatre. Forsythe's re-mix of Beethoven deliberately disrupts the type of listening occasioned in the culture of ballet spectatorship, where according to George Balanchine, the composer's music "provides the dancer's floor"[34] and the choreographer must "show" the audience the music.[35] Engaging with the disassociative

33 See Christopher Small: *Musicking. The Meanings of Performing and Listening*, Middletown, CT 2011.

34 Balanchine: Work in Progress, p. 190.

35 George Balanchine, cited in Stephanie Jordan: *Moving Music. Dialogues with Music in Twentieth-Century*

potential of music and dance, Forsythe cultivates an alertness based on an embodied and intersubjective approach, akin to Barthes's notion of what it means to listen. While the term re-mix can have pejorative connotations, I hope that I have shown how Forsythe's recombinatorics are a means, not of completely disassociating dance and music, but rather (as Merce Cunningham and John Cage discovered) of exploring the rich and multiform ways that music and dance can be independent, and yet still come together.

Ballet, London 2000, p. xiv, after Antoine Livio: Balanchine et Stravinsky 40 ans d'amité, in: Ballet Danse. L'Avant Scène 1/3 (1980): Le Sacre du Printemps, p. 124.

Inhalt

Rund um Beethoven

Interpretationsforschung heute •

Herausgegeben von Thomas Gartmann und Daniel Allenbach

Musikforschung der
Hochschule der Künste Bern

Herausgegeben von Martin Skamletz
und Thomas Gartmann

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